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Army Spearheads Stateside Instruction for Iraqi Engineers

By Betsy Weiner

AN NASIRIYAH, Iraq -- Twenty-four of Gulf Region South (GRS) District's Iraqi engineers joined six of their American counterparts from the U. S. Army Corps of Engineer's Construction Contract Administration class Dec.3-6, the first time such a course of instruction has been held in Iraq.

The class provides project and resident engineers with information about day-to-day job duties, according to Russell Holeman, Chief of the Engineering and Construction Division, GRS.

"The training was conceived by my predecessor, Andy Adams," he said. "We provide a lot of information to the engineers in the States through a lot of training courses to be in (project and resident engineer) positions. We realized that we send our people in the States through a lot of training courses to be in (project and resident engineer) positions. We do the same thing with the Iraqi engineers?" He said the class, as taught in the U.S., stresses information on day-to-day construction contract administration and the roles and responsibilities of engineers administering those contracts.

The class gives them an explanation of how to interpret drawing and specifications and how to present that information to a contractor, Holeman said.

"The class also teaches engineers about the importance of conferences - preconstruction conferences, design conferences, and the meetings throughout the life of a project. It presents general information about quality management; what to look for to ensure quality. The contractor is responsible for achieving that quality, but the engineer must understand his or her role making sure the contractor produces a quality product that we can turn over to the owner."

Holeman contacted the Huntsville Center in Alabama and coordinated with them to export the classes to Iraq. Instructors Alex Herrera, project engineer, and John Briggs, resident engineer, from the Fort Campbell resident office, Louisville District, volunteered to come to Iraq and present the course of instruction not only for GRS but also for the northern and central districts as well.

Both men teach the course through the United States and both have been to Iraq on multiple tours, Briggs for three and Herrera for two. "We both served in the al-Hillah area during the assessments and then we traveled to Iraq to set up the original GRS office," Briggs said. "I called the call a month ago from Marilyn and I decided to come over. We believe in the mission and this is something we really wanted to do."



John Briggs, a resident engineer with the Fort Campbell Resident Office of the Louisville District, teaches a class contact decision making to Iraqi and American engineers and construction representatives in the Construction Contract Administration course at Camp Adder in Iraq, Dec. 3-6. [ARMY Photo by Betsy Weiner]

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Briggs said the course focuses on the rules and regulations surrounding contract administration and the responsibilities of the area and resident engineers.

"I took the course five years ago and it is the same course," he said. "It explains how the Corps deals with its contractors – from estimations to negotiations, and how to get the quality we need from them."

Both men recognized many of the Iraqi engineers from previous tours and that made the experience even more gratifying.

Herrera commented about the high quality of their work and their efforts to get the right information.

The instruction materials from the manuals, to the final exam, are on the leading edge of the Corps' technology – and the feedback Herrera received from the students was "they are learning a lot. We have asked for their feedback throughout the whole course

"The training sessions are so useful and concentrate on the daily methods of dealing with construction projects administration," said an Iraqi architect who works with Thi Qar Area Office. "The U.S. Army trainers gave us the solutions and the answers for all the problems and the questions that could face us at any construction site in the future."

"The Corps also supplied us with data books which will be our references to accomplish correctly our site missions. This training should have been done before now, but overall, we are so thankful and grateful for all the people who participated to set up this training. And we hope to get more training in the future," he said.

An Iraqi civil engineer who works with Basrah Area Office said, "The training is very interesting. It added lots of information to what we know. It has enhanced our engineering experiences and helped develop our technical skills to be able to handle any engineering difficulty and to fix any contracting violations in accordance with the project engineers."

Briggs explained that this course was the first of its kind taught in Iraq and that the GRS Commander, Col. Gary Johnston, will evaluate feedback from instructors, Holeman and the students to determine whether he needs to bring more prospective classes in or offer other internal training here.

"GRS is at the spear point to bring in the Iraqi engineers and train them to be able to take over our work in the future and to get them all here," Briggs said.

"This group is amazing. GRS is leading the way in transferring our responsibilities to them – the Iraqis. One of the engineers 'Now you are giving us the road to get to the end.' It is exciting to be a part of it," he said.



Instructor Alex Herrera with the Fort Campbell Resident Office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Louisville District, teaches Construction Contract Coordination to 30 Iraqi and American engineers and construction representatives at Camp Arifjan, Iraq, Dec. 3-6. [ARMY Photo by Betsy Weiner]

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